



# ***COMMITTEE of the WHOLE***

## ***CITY COUNCIL***

**MINUTES**  
**February 7, 2011**  
**5:00 P.M.**

### **COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:**

D. Reed, S. Marmarou, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, V. Spencer, F. Acosta, D. Sterner

### **OTHERS PRESENT:**

L. Kelleher, S. Katzenmoyer, O. Smith, R. Epler, C. Younger, H. Tangredi, C. Geffken, W. Heim, J. Conrad, F. Denbowski, T. McMahon, J. Palmer

Mr. Spencer called the Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 5:20 p.m.

### **I. Presentation by Olivet Boys and Girls Club**

Mr. McMahon introduced Mr. Palmer and noted the great job Olivet does with City youth. He stated that their current location in east Reading is no longer feasible.

Mr. Palmer stated that Olivet was located at Southern Junior High School during Mayor Haggerty's tenure. He stated that the program relocated to Amanda Stoudt and then to its current location on Perkiomen Ave. Mr. Palmer stated that the Olivet strategic plan showed a need for their presence in the Glenside, Oakbrook and southeast Reading areas. He explained that their current building, a synagogue, has proved costly to retrofit to their needs.

Mr. Palmer stated that a new strategic plan has been performed which shows a continued need in the southeast Reading area. He stated that Olivet currently has nine sites in the City and showed a rendering of the Olivet facility at Oakbrook and stated that this building type could be used at the Pendora location.

Mr. Palmer stated that a capital campaign will begin to raise \$2.8 - \$3 million for this facility and that the ideal location would be Pendora Park. He stated that the fieldhouse would be

demolished to make way for the new building. He stated that the community would continue to have access to the park areas. He stated that the Olivet would renovate the ball field similar to the one at Hoodak Stadium. He stated that \$1.8 million would be used for the building and the City would continue its CD funding of programs.

Mr. Marmarou questioned the exact location of the new building. Mr. Palmer stated that it would be located where the current fieldhouse stands.

Mr. McMahon questioned if the facility could be used for community events. Mr. Palmer stated that it could as all their facilities can be used for community events.

Mr. Marmarou stated that the ball field at Pendora is one of the most heavily used. He questioned parking for this facility. Mr. Palmer stated that there is currently off street parking on Forest St. He stated that parking would be used by their two full time staff and 10 – 15 part time staff.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she has a professional relationship with Mr. Palmer and stated that she has spoken with him and with neighbors of Pendora. She stated that this is an historic park and noted that the ball field area was once a lake. She also noted the problems with water run-off from Mt. Penn and expressed her belief in balancing current needs with history.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the City is currently working to create a Recreation Commission with the Reading School District and noted that this Commission should decide the use of Pendora. She noted that the fieldhouse is in need of repair.

Mr. Spencer stated that this is the first time many people are hearing about this plan.

Ms. Reed questioned what Olivet would do with their current site. Mr. Palmer stated that a church has been using the former Temple space. He stated that Olivet would most probably sell the site. He stated that the City owns the grassy triangle next to the Temple and deed restrictions do not allow building.

Ms. Reed questioned what would be done with the proceeds from the sale. Mr. Palmer stated that Olivet is not counting on the proceeds to fund this project.

Ms. Reed expressed her belief that a retro use would be best at this location. Mr. Palmer stated that the Olivet does not intend to invest in its current location.

Ms. Reed questioned having an historic concept to the building if it would replace the fieldhouse. Mr. Palmer stated that he is not against this concept but that it would depend on the cost. He stated his willingness to adjust the color palette.

Ms. Reed noted her involvement with the Planning Commission during negotiations with Sovereign for their 5<sup>th</sup> & Penn location and how changes were made to reflect the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

Mr. Sterner stated that historic significance was not considered when the rec center was built at 11<sup>th</sup> & Pike playground. He noted his support of this concept.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz clarified that the fieldhouse is in need of repair but is not falling apart. She stated that this is a strong structure in need of improvement.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if Olivet considered other locations in southeast Reading. Mr. Palmer stated that they considered the former St. Mary's School but that this building would also be difficult to retrofit.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if Olivet would be willing to look into locating at Neversink or 10<sup>th</sup> & South rather than Pendora. Mr. Palmer noted his willingness to look at these locations.

Mr. Marmarou questioned how many youth would be served by the programs. Mr. Palmer stated that it would be approximately 150.

Mr. McMahon stated that this would get many more youths off the streets. He questioned if there was a restriction to the number of members. Mr. Palmer explained that they must follow the recommendation of the Fire Marshal in relation to the building size.

Mr. Spencer questioned the age of those who may become members. Mr. Palmer stated that members can be age 6 – 18.

Mr. Marmarou noted that Pendora's ball field is used by many leagues. Mr. Palmer noted his willingness to work with the City. He stated that Olivet would get first consideration for the field and others could use it when Olivet was not.

Mr. Marmarou questioned how many teams use the field. Ms. Katzenmoyer stated that she was unsure of a number but stated that Southern Middle School uses Pendora for their practices and as their home field. Mr. Acosta stated that there are at least six leagues that he is aware of that use this field. He stated that there will be problems if all these teams cannot use Pendora.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that the Recreation Department and Park and Recreation Advisory Committee have a voice in this decision.

Mr. Acosta voiced his concerns with the ball field being unavailable to other teams.

Mr. Marmarou described the situation with Egelman's ball field and noted that the league who has first consideration at this field does not allow other teams to use it.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz reiterated that the Park and Recreation Advisory Committee should be involved with this issue. She questioned if the City would retain ownership of Pendora. Mr. Palmer stated that Olivet is looking for a long-term \$1 per year lease agreement.

Mr. McMahon questioned if Olivet would be scheduling the use of the ball field. Mr. Palmer stated that if Olivet invests in the field and maintains it, they would want to manage all usage of this field.

Mr. Acosta again voiced his concern that other teams would not have access to this field. He noted the example of Alvernia and the softball field at Angelica. He stated that although the lease gives access to others through scheduling with the City, the reality is that no one but Alvernia is allowed to use the field. He noted his understanding of the City wanting to be relieved of the maintenance of this large park but expressed his belief that this does not outweigh keeping the park as is with open access to all.

Mr. McMahon stated that a strategic planning session is needed.

Mr. Smith expressed his belief that if Olivet invests in the field, they will not grant access to others to use it.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that league use is important but that all must consider that this is a community park. She noted the need for the community to access the park, including the ball field, as well. She stated that the community has a sense of ownership of this park and that they must be heard.

Ms. Reed stated that there are also many School District areas which are heavily used. She described how City CDBG funding was used for the playground at 10<sup>th</sup> & Penn and that it is locked at the end of each school day. She noted the need for Council to have an overview of all recreation facilities.

Mr. Smith stated that he is the current Chair of the Park and Recreation Advisory Committee and a resident of this neighborhood. He noted his participation in Ms. Katzenmoyer's greenbelt project which examined PW 11 from the Recovery Plan. He stated that the greenbelt project identified several parks/playgrounds in southeast Reading for potential partnerships but that Pendora was not one of them. He suggested that this project occur at Neversink or 10<sup>th</sup> & South as both of these locations were identified for partnerships. He stated that parks can be hubs to neighborhood revitalization and that Pendora is a hub to this neighborhood.

Mr. Spencer questioned if the Olivet was willing to consider other sites. Mr. Palmer noted his willingness to examine these other locations.

Mr. Spencer stated that this plan needs further discussion. He stated that Council approval must be given for the lease agreement but noted that community input must be garnered as well.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that the City's skateboard park is also located at Pendora. She noted the importance of keeping this area open to all.

Mr. Acosta noted the flooding which occurs at Pendora's ball field during weather events. Mr. Palmer stated that he has witnessed these conditions.

Ms. Epler stated that there is a thriving rec center currently located in the fieldhouse. She stated that these youths receive homework help, games and a meal. She stated that some do not attend now because of the cost of membership. She noted the need for community input and for the Olivet to consider how Pendora intertwines with other parks in the area. She noted the need for on-going discussion and requested Council not commit to this project at this time.

Mr. Denbowski questioned the Olivet timeline. Mr. Palmer stated that the capital campaign would begin in 2012. He stated that this project is a priority.

Mr. Denbowski questioned if this project did not gain Council approval if Olivet would remain at their current location. Mr. Palmer stated that they would not as they are not willing to invest in this location.

Ms. Epler noted that the Pendora Playground Association has recently purchased additional playground equipment for small children to climb on. She stated that there are children playing in both play areas daily and that the basketball courts are very heavily used. She noted the need for the City to continue a summer playground program at this location and that leadership is needed. She noted the heavy usage of the park by residents who picnic and walk there daily.

Mr. Spencer stated that the Recreation Commission should be involved in this decision.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the use of the pavilions for picnics and parties. She stated that this park has heavy community use. She questioned when Olivet needed a decision. Mr. Palmer stated that if this project is not feasible, they will move to another project outside the City.

Mr. Sterner noted the need to have these issues addressed. He noted that the possibility of 150 youths using this facility would increase the usage of the park. He reminded all that youth are also part of the community.

Mr. Palmer noted his willingness to review Neversink and 10<sup>th</sup> & South in relation to this project. He noted that he must bring this project to his Board at the end of February. He stated that demographics have shown that there are enough youths in this area to support the center.

Mr. Marmarou described the increased enrollment at Rotary Park. He stated that teams fill quickly and that youths can no longer be guaranteed to play.

Mr. Spencer thanked Mr. Palmer for his presentation.

The meeting adjourned at 6:10 pm.

Respectfully Submitted  
*Linda A. Kelleher*, CMC  
City Clerk